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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9463
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 2819
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0641
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0517
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 1093
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC PRIORITY

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EUR/CARC, EUR/RUS, EEB

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: NAVCENT COMMANDER OFFERS
HYDROCARBON SECURITY COOPERATION -- BUT TURKMENISTAN NOT
READY TO BITE

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. During a September 29 meeting, the U.S. Navy Commander of the Combined Maritime Forces (NAVCENT), Vice Admiral Kevin Cosgriff, offered Minister of Oil and Gas Baymyrat Hojamuhamedov assistance with improving Turkmenistan's capacity to deal with a variety of security threats to its hydrocarbon sector. The minister, a technocrat who clearly had never previously considered security issues, was largely dismissive, though he agreed to consider NAVCENT's offer. Notwithstanding his less-than-enthusiastic reception of NAVCENT's offer, we believe that the answer could change once Turkmenistan's authorities have collectively had more of a chance to consider the issues at stake. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) During a September 29 meeting with Minister of Oil and Gas Baymyrat Hojamuhamedov, Vice Admiral Cosgriff noted that the U.S. Navy works with friends on the Arabian Peninsula, where there have been two attacks and at least one foiled attack, to protect the security of their hydrocarbon infrastructure. While the same situation does not exist in the Caspian Sea region, it could, and Cosgriff said that one thing that the United States Navy and others are learning in the Arabian Peninsula is that all parties must cooperate and work together to protect hydrocarbon infrastructure. For this reason, the Vice Admiral had asked to meet with Minister Hojamuhamedov, and he wanted to listen to the minister's concerns about hydrocarbon security.

¶3. (SBU) Hojamuhamedov responded that most of his discussions are about oil and gas, and this was the first time this subject had been raised with him. That said, the minister has no concerns about the security of Turkmenistan's factories or infrastructure, an assessment that foreign companies active in Turkmenistan will agree with. Turkmenistan is neutral, and has not had any security problems since it received its independence in 1991. If, however, the Vice Admiral really wants to discuss this issue, he should do so with Turkmenistan's law enforcement organs, rather than with the Ministry of Oil and Gas. Cosgriff noted

that, in the U.S. Navy's experience, if any problems develop, the Ministry of Oil and Gas will probably become involved.

¶4. (SBU) The Vice Admiral pointed out threats to security do not always involved attacks. They can include emergencies caused by oil platform explosions or oil spills, which could cause severe problems. He pointed out that in dealing with oil spills time counts. And the damage from a catastrophic oil spill can close down water desalinization plants and cross borders. It is easier to deal quickly and efficiently with oil spills than to have to figure out how to provide millions of gallons of potable water to a city whose water supply is impacted by an oil spill. Cosgriff offered cooperation in sharpening the skills of emergency responders to these or other security threats.

¶5. (SBU) Hojамuhamedov stated that, while the Ministry of Oil and Gas always welcomes training, but already has a number of courses for dealing with oil field emergencies, and Turkmenistan's emergency response personnel can deal effectively with crises. For example, he claimed, in the case of an oilfield blow-out, Turkmenistan had called in Chinese and American companies to help put deal with the emergency, but nobody was able to do so. In the end, Turkmenistan was able to contain the blow-out on its own. (NOTE: If Hojамuhamedov was referring to the blow-out in Turkmenistan's South Yoloton field last year, it was caused by a Chinese drilling team. After months of trying to get the blow-out under control, Turkmenistan called in a U.S. firm, Cudd Pressure Control, which was finally able to extinguish the fire. This is the only such incident we are aware of involving both Chinese and U.S. companies. END NOTE.) As for the capacity of the Caspian littoral countries

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to deal with cross-border emergencies, while he did not know what arrangements existed elsewhere, Turkmenistan is always ready to lend a hand. The minister concluded by promising to consider Vice Admiral Cosgriff's offer of cooperation in dealing with hydrocarbon emergencies. The Government of Turkmenistan will let NAVCENT know if it decides to go forward with cooperation in this area.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: Hojамuhamedov, whose background is more technical than policy-oriented, clearly was unprepared to discuss these issues -- and, quite probably, never has had to consider the possibility of dealing with a largescale hydrocarbon disaster. That said, if Turkmenistan really is planning on the significant expansion of its hydrocarbon sector that it seems to be offering up, the possibility of hydrocarbon-related crises increases substantially. The interest of other government sectors -- most notably, among law enforcement and military personnel -- in learning more about disaster management demonstrates both a growing recognition of how weak Turkmenistan's capabilities are in this particular area and an increased understanding of the need to be able to cope with the unexpected. While Hojамuhamedov's first response may have been a reflexive "we don't need this, thank you very much," post believes that this answer could change once the authorities have collectively had more opportunity to consider the issues at stake. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND